Tells the Facts and Names the Names

CounterPunch

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The Worst Thing Ron Brown Ever Did?

Let Us Count The Ways

In the years since he was installed in Clinton's cabinet as secretary of commerce, the American people have learned that there is nothing that Ron Brown will not do for money. Indeed the latest example of Brown's venality, slum-lording in Washington, comes almost as an anti-climax when set against some of his other ventures.

In the premiere issue of **CounterPunch** (November, 1993) we disclosed new information about Brown's early-1980s lobbying on behalf of Haiti's "Baby Doc" Duvalier. But even service for Haiti's ex-dictator pales in comparison to work he performed for Guatemala during the same period. Brown, a lobbyist at the D.C. law firm of Patton, Boggs & Blow, worked for the Sugar Growers of Guatemala, a group headed by Julio Herrera, whose family had links to the death squads.

Indeed, Brown's law firm represented three Guatemalan clients between 1980 and 1993, when tens of thousands of civilians were massacred. One of the tasks taken on by Patton, Boggs during the latter part of this epoch was preparing a report minimizing the government's responsibility in the killing of American Michael DeVine, whose virtual beheading at the hands of army troops had dampened relations between Washington and Guatemala City.

As always with Guatemala, it is necessary to preface discussion of the special relationship between the U.S. and regimes varying only in the degree of their barbarity with a reminder: anyone working for the Guatemalan government or that country's elites was knowingly associating themselves with killers of barely imaginable savagery.

Coyness has only prevailed on the degree of sponsorship and direct connivance exercised by the U.S. government. This coyness has now been somewhat disturbed by the campaign waged by Jennifer Harbury to discover the fate of her Guatemalan husband, Efrain Bamaca Velasquez, whose murder was superintended by a man on the CIA's payroll.

Back in the early-1980s, Ron Brown surely knew what he was getting into — and he was well compensated for his efforts. When he left Patton, Boggs to join the Clinton administration, Brown received a $1 million settlement to resign his partnership, a figure based on a percentage of the firm's profits during his years of service.

Patton, Boggs & Blow first came on the scene in Guatemala in 1980, when Gen. Romeo Lucas Garcia was in the middle of a four-year reign, presiding over the worst period of repression in the country's modern history. By its own count, during the first ten months of 1980 the Guatemalan army executed some 3,000 "subversives".

In the midst of this carnage, firm partner Tommy Boggs, brother of the ghastly Cokie Roberts, signed up a new client, *Amigos del Pais*, or Friends of the Nation. The *Amigos*, once described as the "John Birch Society of Guatemala", are a group of landowners which financed death squad activities and which maintained especially tight links to ultra-rightist army officers gathered in Officials of the Mountain (the latter group's exceptionally rabid nature is seen in a *Comunicado* it released in 1988, in which it denounced Col. Julio Roberto Alpirez, the

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Going by the Book

"Specially designed implements of torture, strait jackets, police helmets and shields ... An individual validated export license is required for foreign policy purposes to export [these] crime control and detection instruments."

— Rule 5999B, Commerce Department's 1984 Commodity Control List

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The World of Learning

Groves of Darkness

Harvard's decision to deny admittance to Gina Grant, discovered to have killed her mother in 1990, seems to indicate that murder will no longer be regarded as a useful credential. Among Harvard's graduates in the early-1990s was Gen. Hector Gramajo, whose military career flourished during the decade of Guatemalan carnage described elsewhere in this issue.

In 1989, Gramajo stepped down as defense minister, presumably because the Guatemalan constitution requires a five-year period in civilian life for any military man seeking the presidency. By this time he had established a solid reputation among U.S. government agencies. He was on the CIA's payroll, and at his home in Guatemala kept a a signed copy of former Agency Director William Colby's book, *Lost Victory,* with the inscription, "To a colleague in the effort to find a strategy of counterinsurgency with decency and democracy". USAID kept a fatherly eye on his educational attainments, which had already been nourished by several sessions in U.S. military academies.

Prodded by USAID, Harvard's Kennedy School offered Gramajo a Mason fellowship, and in 1990 he graduated with a diploma in public policy. On the day he was honored by Harvard, Gramajo was served with a writ from the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), charging him with responsibility for the torture by Guatemalan troops of U.S. Sister Dianna Ortiz, and for the deaths of nine Mayan Indians. On April 13 a U.S. judge imposed a fine – this was a civil suit – on Gramajo of $47.5 million.

Initial inquiries to Harvard about Gramajo's presence elicited statements to the effect that the university was ignorant of the fact, a posture repeated in the case of Sintong Panjaitan, aka The Butcher of Dili. Panjaitan was the Indonesian officer presiding over the Dili massacre of November 11, 1991 in East Timor, when some 200 unarmed protestors were killed. Shortly thereafter he headed for Cambridge, and was discovered by local activists in Brookline.

Harvard has always denied suspicions that Panjaitan was on the books. In any event, the officer's sojourn in Brookline was disturbed by a suit from CCR, charging him with prompting the death of a youth in the Dili massacre. Panjaitan instantly fled. The U.S. District Court duly imposed a $14 million fine.

Indonesia is one of the stomping grounds of Freeport McMoRan, a U.S. corporation to whose exchequer more than one institution of higher learning has extended a begging hand. Our friend **Eyal Press** has furnished us with this report:

In the great tradition of academic fealty to large corporations, Freeport McMoRan, a New Orleans-based mining company, is greenwashing its image with the help of environmental departments at various colleges. Freeport needs all the p.r. help it can get. In Indonesia, it damages rivers and rain forest with its vast gold mining operations, and in its home state of Louisiana it poisons groundwater with the company's radioactive gypsum plants.

Five Louisiana universities – Tulane, Xavier, Loyola, Louisiana State University and the University of New Orleans – have formed an environmental "work group" bankrolled by Freeport. The group's purpose, according to James Regens, Freeport McMoRan professor of environmental studies at Tulane, is to "study and solve some of the important environmental issues facing Louisiana". The practices of the group's patron, which releases millions of pounds of toxics annually into the state's groundwater – more than any other company – will likely receive meager scrutiny.

Meanwhile, Loyola is conducting an intensive search for a Freeport-endowed "environmental communications" chair. The ideal candidate, the school says bluffly, should "service to the communications needs of private industry."

Freeport has also inserted itself into the affairs of the University of Texas at Austin, alma mater of company CEO James Robert "Jim Bob" Moffett. Since 1989 Freeport has paid $1.4 million to U.T.'s geology department for research in the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya, where the corporation has enormous operations. The company flies graduate students and professors to the area to undertake work that will generate revenues for Freeport and for the Suharto dictatorship.

University Chancellor William Cunningham sits on Freeport's board of directors, for which he receives $40,000 annually, thus complementing his salary from the school of $170,000. "The worlds of business and academia need to understand one another better," Cunningham says. "Service by academic leaders on corporate boards is an accepted and efficient means of furthering this goal."

U.T. recently waived a rule which forbids campus facilities from being named after living persons, in order to unveil the new Louise and James Robert Moffett molecular biology building. The Moffett lab was constructed on the remnants of a wing of the Anna Hiss Gymnasium, a beautiful building of Spanish-Mediterranean architecture which the Texas Historical Commission had lobbied to preserve and which contained U.T.'s only handicap-accessible swimming pool. ■

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(Brown, continued from p. 1)

man who directed the killings of DeVine and Bamaca, as a traitorous liberal who was "servile" to civilian authorities).

Robert White, ex-U.S. ambassador to El Salvador, tells us that the *Amigos* paid officers within Officials of the Mountain to carry out its economic program: "When it was necessary, troops would be sent out to break up strikes [affecting *Amigos*'s members] and to weed out those who were deemed troublemakers."

While lethal suppression of labor unrest was the chief aim of the *Amigos* in Guatemala, the main external priority of the group was improvement in relations with the U.S., which had deteriorated during the Carter years. Though a Carter-era ban on arms shipments had not materially affected the flow of military aid from the Pentagon to the Guatemalan armed forces, Boggs lobbied with gusto for a public demonstration by the U.S. government of forgiveness, most notably willingness to remit weaponry to the Lucas Garcia regime. Guatemala, Boggs argued, was a nation deserving of sympathy, particularly as it faced "economic, social and insurgent difficulties".

With Ronald Reagan installed at the White House as of 1981, the message peddled by Boggs — whose client list at the time earned him the label of "lawyer of choice for Latin dictators" from Larry Birns of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs — was warmly received by administration officials. But the Guatemalans still faced problems in Congress, and Boggs, representing a prominent Democratic law firm, was of much use to the *Amigos* in this regard. Records show that he swarmed about Capitol Hill in mid-year, meeting with key Democratic members of Congress to urge that they ease up on Guatemala.

By 1982, guerilla groups were a major threat to the government and Guatemala's new leader, General Rios Montt, launched a scorched earth campaign in the countryside. Hundreds of Indian villages were razed and thousands of residents murdered.

Into this setting stepped Ron Brown. On January 19, 1982 he signed up a major catch for Patton, Boggs, the Guatemalan Sugar Growers Association, whose membership included prominent members of the rural oligarchy. On the very day that Brown closed the deal, the Guatemalan Army "disappeared" religious worker Sergio Berten. On February 13, with Brown now eagerly advancing his client's cause in Washington, Brother James Miller, an American Christian lay worker, was shot dead by masked men as he worked with a group of poor indigenous students in Huehuetenango. In the four months after Brown inked the agreement, more than 2,000 people were killed in what Amnesty International termed "large scale extrajudicial assassinations".

None of this appears to have troubled Brown, who lobbied officials at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative to increase Guatemala's quota for sugar exports to the U.S. He also met with staffers from the National Security Council, probably because he was seeking to have Guatemala pick up a portion of Nicaragua's sugar quota, which had been cut by the Reagan administration as part of its campaign to destroy the Sandinista government.

Brown signed a deal with a right-wing Guatemalan client on the same day the army "disappeared" a religious worker

The Sugar Growers were no more attractive a client than the *Amigos*. During the early-1980s, strikes by cane cutters — seeking an increase in the minimum wage of about $1 a day — were repressed, with a number of peasant organizers killed by army troops.

The head of the Sugar Growers, and the man who signed the deal with Brown, was Julio Herrera, a member of Guatemala's second wealthiest clan. Another family member worked closely with Mario Sandoval Alarcon, a founder of the *Mano Blanco* death squad and an attendee at Reagan's 1981 inauguration.

Julio Herrera himself was known as being a fanatic right-winger even by Guatemalan standards. In addition to his sugar interests, Herrera was also the primary owner of Lunafil, a textile plant, where pro-union workers organized a sit-down strike in 1987. Some of Lunafil's other owners wanted to settle, but Herrera refused. "It was a matter of principle for him", recalls Peter Hogness, the ex-director of the U.S.-Guatemala Labor Education Project. "He seemed to consider unions to be a half breath away from communism."

Patton, Boggs's most recent work for Guatemala came in the early-1990s. As always, the Guatemalans turned to their favorite Washington firm after a terrible period of repression had sullied the nation's image.

DeVine, who ran a hotel in the highlands, was abducted by security forces on June 8, 1990, allegedly because he had discovered army units illegally logging mahogany wood. His corpse was found the following day, his head partially severed by a machete. On September 11, anthropologist Myrna Mack Chang, a supporter of indigenous groups, was stabbed to death as she left her office. On December 2, thirteen people, including two children, were killed in Santiago Atitlan when soldiers opened fire on a group of Tzutujil Indians.

A month later Patton, Boggs's David Todd signed a $220,000 annual contract to represent President Jorge Serrano Elias, a civilian who was forced from office in 1993 after he sought to assume dictatorial powers. The contract said the law firm would "provide advice and general guidance about trade, aid and credit issues" and "undertake specific projects on matters involving credit for Guatemala from United States and international lending institutions".

During Serrano's period in office Americas Watch reported that "government forces continued to commit torture, murder and disappearances with impunity". Todd, however, was busy dispatching a steady stream of upbeat materials about Guatemala to members of Congress and top staffers lauding the "economic, social and human rights progress" under the Serrano government. On May 16, 1991 Todd distributed a "status report on Michael DeVine", offering the Guatemalan government's point-of-view in the death of the American innkeeper — an important piece of work for Todd's client since anger over DeVine's death had led to a reduction in U.S. aid to Guatemala.

We sought comment from Brown on his work for Guatemala, but received no reply to our queries. Messages left for Todd at Patton, Boggs & Blow were also not returned. ■

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Falcon & Falconer

The U.S. Government in Central America

For the first time since the CIA-orchestrated coup against President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, the press has turned its attention to Guatemala. But one could easily conclude from most reports that the U.S. role in Guatemala's tragedy is quite minor, and that the CIA was guilty only of mistakenly putting its trust in Col. Julio Roberto Alpirez and a few other bad apples in the army.

The tone of weary moral disengagement was evident in an April 9 article in *The New York Times* by Clifford Krauss. He argued that Guatemala has always been a bloody place and nothing much can be done about it. "Guatemala required neither Karl Marx nor the CIA to be consumed by class and ethnic war," Krauss wrote. "The Guatemalan army, currently in the news because some of its officers received secret C.I.A. payments, is essentially finishing the job that the conquistadores started."

Guatemala does indeed have a history seamed with violence, but between 1944 and 1954 a democratic system was in place. Political killings, though not eliminated, were few. Unfortunately, Arbenz — who favored agrarian reform and nationalization of United Fruit — "challenged the United States at the height of the Cold War," in Krauss's words, thereby making necessary his overthrow.

After the coup against Arbenz, the U.S. played a direct role in the creation of the Guatemalan terror apparatus. Piero Gleijeses, professor of American foreign policy at Johns Hopkins University, has obtained unpublished CIA National Intelligence Estimates and National Intelligence Memorandums covering the years between 1966 and 1968, a period of wide scale repression during which the death squads were emerging.

The reports show the Agency was intimately aware of the activities of the death squads, which, Gleijeses learned from the memos, were created by right-wing sectors but then taken over by the military. Civilians leaders who resisted the incorporation of the death squads into the military apparatus were killed. During this period U.S. special forces were operating in Guatemala and Gleijeses says that the documents indicate that there was very close collaboration between the two countries' military forces.

He tells us: "The CIA knew as early as 1967 that the machinery of death was controlled by the military, not by the far right. The U.S. government was lying through in its teeth when it claimed that violence in Guatemala was the result of clashes between the far left and the far right. It was the result of government-controlled groups, but this couldn't be admitted since the U.S. was sending aid directly to the killers."

Guatemala is not the only Central American nation where U.S. support for terror is a relative "secret" only in this country. In Honduras, the CIA helped establish Battalion 3-16, the military unit which "disappeared" several hundred leftists in the early 1980s. The story of 3-16, including its links to the U.S. is told in *The Facts Speak for Themselves*, a 1994 study prepared by Leo Valladares Lanza, Honduras's National Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights.

The study gives substantial details about U.S. support for the battalion. Valladares discusses the role of General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, who worked with the CIA in creating 3-16 and who, after being deposed in 1984, moved to Miami and took a $400 a day consulting job with the Pentagon, preparing a study on low-intensity conflict.

Also included in the report is testimony from Florencio Caballero, a Honduran intelligence officer formerly with 3-16. He identified three CIA agents who worked with the battalion: "Mike", who took part in interrogation sessions; Lieut. Rivera (pseudonym Attorney Javier), a Puerto Rican technician; and "Mr. Bill," an interrogation instructor who, Caballero says, later died during the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Beirut. Another former member of 3-16, Jose Barrera Martinez, said a CIA agent named Raymond, nicknamed Papi, provided financing for 3-16, and received "weekly reports [on its activities] by plane from Tecucigalpa in a large, yellow envelope".

The preface to the report says that "The United States had a special relationship with those who committed gross human rights violations in Honduras ... Examination of the U.S. role in Honduras's dark years [would] spur a truth-telling process in the U.S."

This process has never taken place. In 1988, a congressional intelligence panel conducted a study of the CIA's links to 3-16, but it remains classified. In late 1993, Valladares asked that the Clinton administration supply him with information about U.S. links to 3-16. Nine members of Congress urged the president to comply with the request.

On December 18, 1993, Clinton — now promising an "unsparing" investigation into CIA activity in Guatemala — wrote to the lawmakers, assuring them that "my administration is committed to open government and to assisting efforts to shed light on past instances of human rights abuses." The president said some time would be needed to respond to Valladares — "preliminary checks" disclosed more than 2,000 documents for the period 1981-84 alone — but pledged action.

A year-and-a-half later, Valladares has still yet to receive a single document from the U.S. ■

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